

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



From the Deputy Assistant Secretary

January 2005



Breakthrough

For the first time in VA's history, we have completed the formal stage of complaint processing in fewer than the EEOC standard of 180 days. This is a significant breakthrough and a major accomplishment, one that we have been striving towards for the past few years.

I commend each of you for this accomplishment and I want to assure you that I will continue to do all that I can to provide the resources you need to continue to excel in this area as well as ensuring that we continue to provide high quality and great customer satisfaction. We want to build on this “break through” attitude to reach our other goals and to ensure that we continue to improve our performance throughout ORM.

In the next few days, I will send an all-employee memo to you addressing our mission, vision and goals. They continue to be essentially the same, but, it is important to re-state, re-emphasize and review what our objectives are to ensure all of us understand where we are trying to go and what our rolls are in reaching our destination.

During his town hall meeting, Mr. Pittman emphasized the importance of the employer/employee relationship in the effectiveness of organizations. I agree completely with that and will only add that this relationship is the basis of employer-of-choice environments. When we treat each other with dignity and respect and work diligently to resolve issues based on that principle, we can accomplish anything. I look forward to great accomplishments in 2005.

James S. Jones

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Wendy Whitted



Wendy Whitted passed away on Sunday, December 26, 2004, while visiting her mother and family for the holidays in Mobile, Alabama.

She began her federal career September 10, 1984, at the VA Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as a Recreation Therapist. During this time, she was also an ad hoc EEO investigator. She later switched her career path after joining the VA Medical Center in Syracuse, New York, becoming the station's EEO Program Manager. There she worked diligently training collateral duty counselors and employees in the EEO complaint process, reorganizing the EEO Committee, and bringing about renewed interest and participation in special emphasis programs.

Wendy joined ORM as an EEO Intake Specialist on February 15, 1998. From the very beginning, she consistently demonstrated a dedication and commitment to the mission of this organization. She believed in doing things decently and in order, and her work exemplified this belief. Wendy cultivated good working relationships with VA facility directors, regional counsels, program managers, and employees in the State of Arkansas, where she was assigned. She could always be relied upon to take on extra duties and responsibilities such as Counselor Team Leader, Mediation Trainer, Intake Specialist Training Committee member, and Awards Committee Chairperson. She was a mentor to several employees in the Mid-South Office, and a "sounding board" for many.

During the early days of Mid-South Operations (Little Rock Field Office), Wendy was instrumental in setting up and organizing the office. She became known as one of the "Friday Night Gang" who stayed after hours organizing the office.

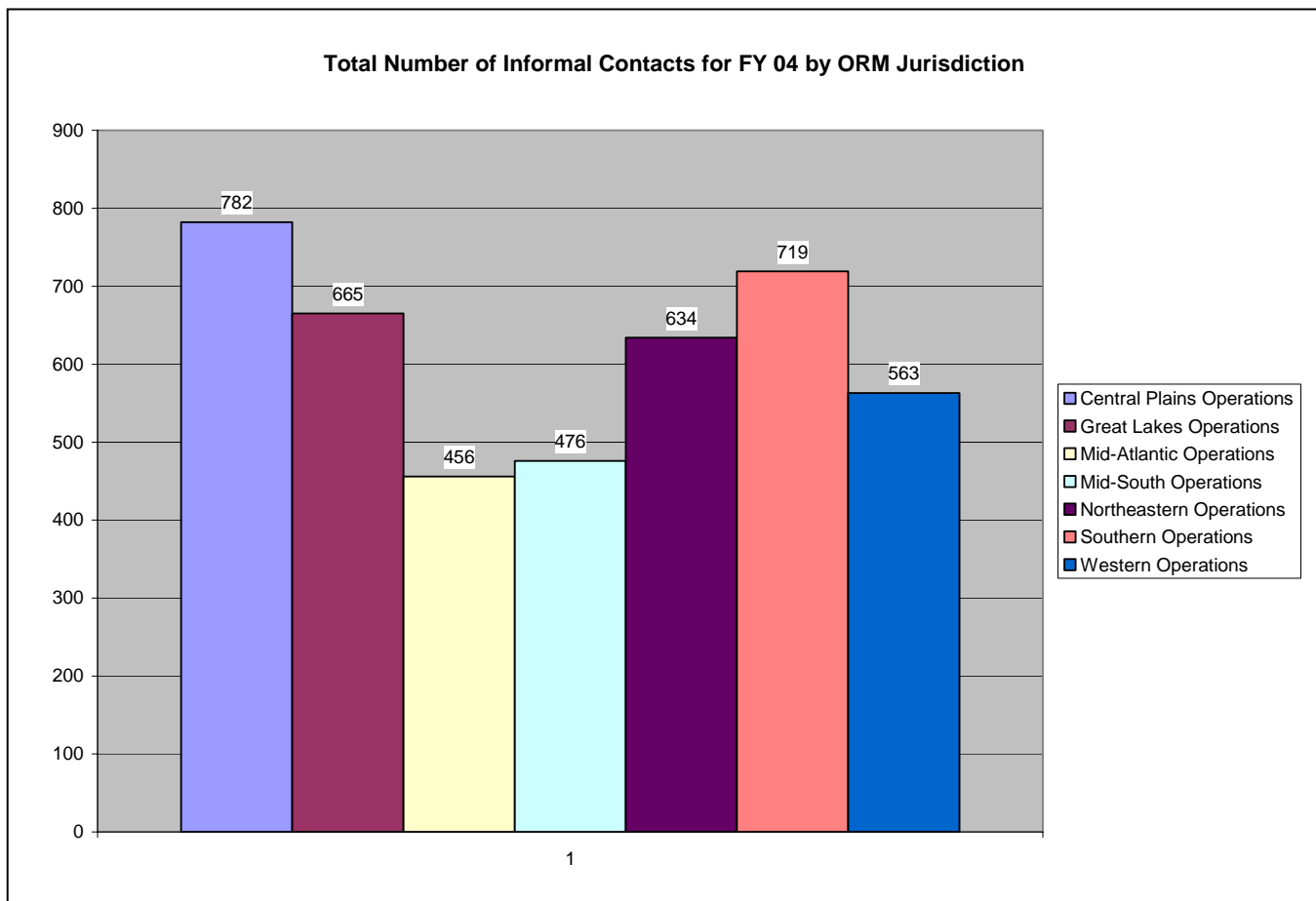
Wendy will be truly missed by employees of Mid-South Operations and all who knew and came to love her.

Kathy Howse

Program Highlights

FY 2004 Informal Contact Activity by ORM Jurisdiction

The following chart provides a snapshot of informal complaint activity by ORM jurisdiction in fiscal year 2004. Informal contacts are the first step in the complaint process.



COMPLAINTS INVOLVING SENIOR MANAGERS

Complaints filed against senior managers are processed the same as all other complaints in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidance. They are monitored and tracked, and a report is provided to upper level management and Congress on a quarterly and annual basis. These are cases where allegations have been made against senior managers based on their alleged personal conduct or an action personally carried out or executed by the senior manager that affects the terms and conditions of an individual's employment. If an allegation appears to be egregious or if several employees raise an identical allegation against the same senior manager, upper level management is notified immediately so that a decision can be made on what action, if any, might be appropriate. This might result in the appointment of a rapid response team to conduct an onsite review and report on its findings. This review does not delay the processing of the EEO complaint. For more information, contact the Office of Policy and Compliance. ■

Incomplete Zegato Travel Documents

On a quarterly basis, Zegato travel documents are reviewed for completeness and Field Managers are notified of employees who have incomplete travel documents in the system. As of January 5, 2005, there are a number of incomplete travel documents in Zegato where an expense report has not been filed.

If you have incomplete travel documents on your desktop, please do one of the following:

- Submit an approved/completed travel plan/expense report or;
- Delete the document by going into your travel desktop. Click on the radio button next to the document. Click on document control. Click on delete.

We appreciate your assistance in helping us clean up the system. Any questions may be referred to Barbara Scott @ 202-501-2817.



Release of Information from EEO Files

The Office of Resolution Management (ORM) has established policies for the release of information from Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint files under the control of ORM in accordance with the requirements of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and the Privacy Act.

The Privacy Act prohibits disclosure of any records about an individual, which are retrieved by that individual's name or personal identifier without that individual's written consent, unless disclosure is specifically authorized by the Act.

All records from which information is retrieved by the name of the personal identifier of an individual must be maintained in what is called a "Privacy Act system of records." When an employee or applicant contacts an EEO counselor, or files a complaint, any resulting information or documents are placed in a system of records belonging to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), but located at the agency where the complaint was filed. These files contain information or documents compiled during pre-complaint counseling and the investigation of complaints. In VA, such files are generally maintained at the ORM Field Office where the complaint was filed.

VA General Counsel has issued a memorandum entitled, Request for Legal Opinion on Releasing Information from EEO Files (VAOPGC ADV 5-99). This memorandum is dated March 26, 1999. It outlines the extent to which ORM employees are authorized to release information from EEO complaint files to VA management, responsible management officials (RMO), complainants, and VA attorneys.

Tyrone Eddins is the FOIA/Privacy Act Officer for ORM. ORM Field Managers are designated FOIA/Privacy Act officers for their offices. The Field Manager, whose office has jurisdiction over the complaint and also has custody of the requested records, will determine whether or not to release complaint records in accordance with instructions from the EEOC and consistent with FOIA and the Privacy Act.

For more information, contact your Field Manager or Tyrone Eddins.



Office Notes

Amber Lynn Fisher

Amber Lynn Fisher, EEO

Investigator at the Pittsburgh, PA satellite office, was recently awarded the “Bronze Star” which is awarded to “any person who, while serving with the U.S. Army, distinguishes himself or herself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service in connection with military operations against an armed enemy; or while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing armed force...”



Amber, an Army reservist, was called to active duty in December 2003 to participate in Operation Enduring Freedom. Since March 2004, she has been in Baghdad, Iraq, and is expected to be there until March 2006. She was also named the 2004 “Employee of the Year” for Northeastern Operations.

40 Years of Government Service

Hwa-Soon (Sue) K. Thorson, Intake Specialist/Investigator with Central Plains Operations, celebrates a major milestone having completed 40 years of government service on January 25, 2005. Congratulations Sue!

Learning Resources

Lewis Henson, ORM Training Officer, **John Jones**, ORM Trainer, and **Austin Lewis**, Regional Manager, Mid-South Operations, met in Little Rock, AK to update the ORM counselor training curriculum for 2005. In addition to basic counselor training for new counselors, EEOC Directive MD 110 requires 8 hours of refresher training for counselors each year. Development of appropriate curriculum to enhance training in all of the core positions (counselor, intake specialist, and investigator) is on-going to ensure our employees have the training and skills necessary to deliver high quality service to our customers.

Northeastern Operations

Gregory Jones, EEO Counselor, has been certified to perform mediations and is mentoring two of our EEO Counselors who are now in the process of obtaining their certification as well. Of Greg's nine mediations in FY 2004, all were successful and seven of the nine resulted in settlement agreements. Greg attended leadership training and interned at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in New York. He also earned his certification as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mediator from EEOC.

Great-Lakes Operations

Holiday Cheer

On Thursday, December 16, 2004, **Daniel Prater** delivered gifts and other needed items donated by the Cleveland staff to two families to make their Christmas a joyous occasion. The employees of the Cleveland Field Office, including the Detroit Satellite Office, adopted two families from Saint Catherine's parish in Cleveland, OH. The employees truly experienced the joy of giving in buying and wrapping the gifts for delivery to the Church. As Father Dickinson, the church pastor noted in his thank you letter, "please tell your employees that they were special 'Christmas elves', who brought much joy and kindness to the families." Prior to this effort, they assisted a mother and her young child during Thanksgiving by contributing money, four large containers filled with food and other household items. Although the mother expressed her appreciation, Clevelanders view their gesture as a small token of appreciation since the mother is a veteran who served our country.

Mid-South Operations

Mid-South Operations adopted a family from their partnership school, Boone Park Elementary, during the Christmas holidays. Over 10 boxes of toys and clothes were donated by the staff and delivered to the family on December 21, 2004. The family consisted of 5 children (shown at left) and their parents. The staff had fun shopping and wrapping gifts to be presented to the family.



Did You Know?

ORM Information Technology "Help Desk"



ORM Information Technology Support (ITS) Division's "Help Desk" provides a central contact point for ORM employees to get information technology (IT) service or support.

The Help Desk:

- Provides a centralized contact point for all your ORM IT needs.
- Responds to your inquiries in a timely fashion.
- Forwards service calls to support personnel and organizations to expedite responsiveness.
- Monitors responsiveness of support personnel and organizations.
- Monitors your satisfaction with the support received.

When you need assistance:

- Call the Help Desk at (202) 273-6676.
- In addition to reaching us by phone, you can email us at:
orm.help@va.gov

When you contact the Help Desk:

- An Information Technology staff member will answer your inquiries Monday to Friday, 7:15 – 4:15 EST. Please be patient if your call rolls over to a messaging system.
- Just leave us your name, number and nature of the call and we will return your call as soon as possible.
- Outside hours of operation, please leave an email or voicemail message and we will respond the next business day.
- Emails provide an excellent way for you to describe your issue as well as document your inquiry.
- Please use this resource whenever possible. Emails and phone calls will be handled in the order they are received.

ORM News is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Contact Terry Washington, External Affairs Program, by e-mail or by calling (202) 501-2800 concerning the contents of this newsletter. Copies of this newsletter are available at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm>.